



# The College as Community- Based Organization

by Todd Andrews  
Goodwin College

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Colleges and universities are increasingly recognizing their role in building healthy environments through relationships with the communities that surround them. The University of Vermont in Burlington, Trinity College in Hartford, and Clark University in Worcester, Massachusetts, are well-known New England examples. East Hartford's Goodwin College, which engag-

es in comprehensive revitalization work, actually sees itself as essentially a community-based organization.

## **A Partner for East Hartford**

In the 1950s, Pratt & Whitney Aircraft established its headquarters in what had once been a rural farm community, and East Hartford flourished. But over the past two

decades, the nature of job opportunities changed, and the city encountered challenges in maintaining a robust economy for residents.

Today Goodwin College is helping East Hartford reinvent itself. Although Goodwin became a college only in 1999, its existence as a community-based organization dates back to its 1962 founding as a private career

school known as The Data Institute Business School. Originally, it helped students with disabilities to prepare for employment. As it grew, it expanded its offerings to meet other demands of the marketplace, partnering with workforce boards and other community-based not-for-profits focused on workforce development and training.

Then in 1999, Data Institute became Goodwin College, with the goal of enabling students to advance in the workplace with a degree or certificate from an accredited institution of higher education. The college became a nonprofit 501(c)(3) institution in July 2004, receiving accreditation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges through the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education.<sup>1</sup>

Part of the reason the college considers itself a community-based organization relates to the people it has served. They are a diverse group of students from more than 100 towns in Connecticut, students who face many barriers to accessing higher education and succeeding. For example, 58 percent of new students enrolling at Goodwin College in fall 2007 were first-generation college students. And 75 percent of that group were simultaneously holding jobs. Moreover, with a median age of 30, many are parents with family responsibilities that compete with academic labors. As many as 87 percent receive financial aid, and 58 percent are earning less than \$25,000.

## Workforce Development

Throughout the transition into an accredited college, Goodwin has retained its community focus. After assessing the needs of area employers and determining the skill sets that workers required, the college developed new programs in high-demand fields such as computer technology and business studies. Working closely with the community's businesses kept the school on top of the rapid changes in companies' needs and led to the creation of programs in early childhood education, nursing, and other in-demand health-care fields.

The focus on community and employer needs has entailed ongoing partnerships with regional industries to develop academic programs that stimulate students' intellectual curiosity while also arming them with skills for available jobs. For instance, the opening of the Connecticut Convention Center in Hartford and related operations

resulted in increased demand for trained hospitality workers. Working with Capital Workforce Partners, the college developed a hospitality and customer-service training program to help meet that demand.<sup>2</sup> Upon program completion, students receive professional certification from the American Hotel and Lodging Association.

## The River and the Brownfields

When rapid growth necessitated building a new campus, Goodwin's connection to the existing community convinced it to remain in East Hartford. Reclaiming an invaluable resource along the Connecticut River that had been lost to the community, the college purchased 30 acres of brownfields. These were parcels formerly used as transfer and storage terminals (large above-ground tanks) for petroleum products. For 60 years, the facilities had been expanded and modified to fit the specific needs of various corporate owners. When the industrial uses ceased, a blighted, contaminated property was left behind. The aesthetic impact on a community that was already challenged by high poverty rates was devastating.

By June 2007, Goodwin College was able to break ground on an ambitious expansion project along the Connecticut River intended to benefit all the communities served by the college. A 2005 economic impact study conducted by consultant Donald Klepper-Smith, chief economist and director of research for DataCore Partners Inc., predicts that the expansion will result in \$79.5 million in total direct and indirect economic benefits for the State of Connecticut and will spur the creation of 1,516 new direct and indirect full-time-equivalent jobs. With larger facilities to accommodate a growing student population, the school anticipates graduating 1,240 students annually by 2010—approximately four times the current number. Moreover, it expects that graduates will earn an average annual salary of \$45,890, totaling \$56.9 million in wages and generating approximately \$2.3 million annually in additional income tax revenue for the state.

The first building for the expansion is being constructed on one of the former brownfields. The 109,000-square-foot building is scheduled for completion in late 2008, with students beginning classes in January 2009. Importantly, the new

building will allow the college to engage the community in a variety of activities. Its new 700-seat auditorium, library, and community rooms will provide inviting spaces for students and local residents interested in roundtable discussions and lecture series. The college is currently developing a plan for public use of the facilities.

Goodwin College has already begun engaging the community through its new campus—for example, by leading nature walks through floodplains it owns south of the new construction. As the college continues its expansion and clean-up, the community will be able to enjoy direct access to the river through deep-water docks. And plans are afoot to run environmental studies from a college research vessel on-site. Goodwin also is working with the Connecticut Science Center to develop river-ecology educational programs for secondary school children. And it is collaborating with Riverfront Recapture, a private nonprofit committed to reconnecting metropolitan Hartford with the Connecticut River and providing community access to the waterfront. Together they hope to extend an existing trail network another two-and-a-half miles along the river through the college's property. Projected plans for the remaining land include construction of residence halls, an early childhood learning center, a dining venue for students, and an environmental studies lab.

## Community Housing and Education

The college also is enhancing the surrounding neighborhoods, which have a mix of commercial, industrial, and residential housing, including a public housing complex. A partnership with the East Hartford Housing Authority will redevelop the 80-unit King Court Housing complex to serve both Housing Authority tenants and students. Tenants will be able to attend Goodwin College tuition-free, enabling them to increase their earning potential and ultimately transition to market-based housing.

Goodwin College also has acquired properties in the residential and commercial neighborhoods surrounding the new campus, hoping to revitalize the commercial district along Main Street. The commercial district will benefit from the neighboring Rentschler Field project—a development project that includes a University of Con-

necticut athletic stadium and an outdoor-gear retailer. Through hearing processes, East Hartford has been able to weigh in on the efforts. As Jeanne Webb, East Hartford's director of development, says, "The town has ... worked closely with the college as it developed its plans for expansion. The college's plan for expansion has been in line with the town's objectives for economic and workforce development. The project complements our goals in every way."

In 2007, to further open educational opportunities to learners in Greater Hartford, the college utilized a grant from the Connecticut State Department of Education for an initiative called the ConnCAP (**C**onnecticut **C**ollegiate **A**wareness and **P**reparation) Program. The program gives area high school students who are first-generation, at-risk, or limited in financial resources critical tools to help them prepare for and succeed in higher education. The program is one of eight in Connecticut.

Recognizing that skill-building oppor-

tunities at a noncollegiate level are still needed, Goodwin College also incorporated two existing programs into its new college structure, English as a Second Language (ESL) and One-2-One Components Training.<sup>3</sup> One-2-One Components Training provides private instruction and focuses specifically on work-related skills that a particular student needs to further develop and to obtain employment. Additionally, there are collaborations with community organizations such as Catholic Charities and the Brazilian Cultural Center to deliver ESL instruction to the area's large immigrant population at little or no cost. Some of the ESL students have already moved into college-level programs at Goodwin and other local institutions.

Goodwin believes that colleges have a social responsibility to care for the communities in which they reside. Even the smallest colleges can have a big impact when they use their resources to help meet a community's needs.

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#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Financing for the first phase of the Goodwin College expansion consisted of a \$24,000,000 loan from NewAlliance Bank, a \$2,250,000 grant from the State of Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development, a \$3,000,000 grant from the Connecticut Brownfields Redevelopment Authority, with the balance of funding being invested directly by the college.

<sup>2</sup> The goal of Capital Workforce Partners is "to leverage public and private resources to produce skilled workers for a competitive regional economy." See <http://www.capitalworkforce.org>.

<sup>3</sup> See <http://www.goodwincollege.org/one2one/index.html>.

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